



GREAT BASIN WATER NETWORK

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December 2, 2008

President-Elect Barack Obama
Members of the Department of Interior Transition Team

VIA E-MAIL

Dear Transition Team Members,

On behalf of the Great Basin Water Network, a non-profit group of farmers, conservationists, tribes, ranchers, sportsmen, scientists, and attorneys which is fighting the proposed Las Vegas water grab of rural groundwater in E. Nevada and in Utah's West Desert, we are writing to alert you to several problems with the current Administration on federal water and NEPA issues which we hope you will address as soon as possible.

1. **Interior Department appointments:** While not the most serious problem with the Bush Administration management of public lands and resources, the rumor in Nevada is that Pat Mulroy, the director of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, is being promoted for a position within the Department of Interior. We do not see her name in any of the press accounts, but are very concerned about this possibility. Our Water Network has been fighting SNWA's plan to transfer up to 200,000 acre-feet of rural groundwater shared by E. Nevada and W. Utah over 200 miles to Las Vegas since 2004 as a social and environmental injustice. Our experience with Ms. Mulroy has been extremely discouraging as her agency and political supporters have tried to squelch objections to the project, have tried to suppress and influence scientific information on pumping impacts, and have refused to pursue other less expensive and less environmentally damaging water supply alternatives for Southern Nevada. We consider Pat Mulroy to be one of Nevada's most toxic assets and urge you NOT to consider her for any Interior Dept. appointments.
2. **Interior Secretary's employee assigned to the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA):** The current Secretary of Interior has outsourced a staff position to Nevada held by Dr. Diana Weigman. We believe Dr. Weigman's irregular job is to "coordinate" the Nevada Interior agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the National Park Service to facilitate SNWA's water exportation project. We do not know the source of her salary, but SNWA may be contributing to it. This position should be eliminated or converted to one to carry out public lands laws and regulations relating to critically needed water resources.
3. **Interior Department's mandate:** We believe that the 4 federal land and resource management agencies in Nevada are under a formal or informal Administrative mandate to "cooperate" with SNWA and facilitate the proposed massive interbasin



water transfer project. We respectfully urge you to restore the Interior Department's mandate to one of protection of public lands and resources, including several National Wildlife Refuges, several National Parks, and millions of acres of public lands used for watersheds, grazing, recreation, wildlife and other multiple uses as well as dozens of water-dependent threatened, endangered and sensitive species.

4. **Stipulated agreements:** The federal agencies in Nevada have been negotiating with SNWA to develop agreements to drop federal protests of SNWA water applications in exchange for a vague future process to talk about whether adverse pumping impacts are occurring, to talk about whose pumping is responsible, and to talk about whether and what mitigation SNWA would agree to provide. These stipulated agreements prevent the federal agencies from vigorously defending public lands and resources from potential severe groundwater mining impacts and abnegate federal responsibilities to carry out federal agency missions, including consulting with affected tribes. The stipulated agreements are negotiated in secret, with no public input allowed, no NEPA compliance required, and with no public participation in the implementation of these secret agreements. We urge you to require investigation of these stipulated agreements to assess whether federal laws and regulations have been circumvented, due to undue political pressure both within and outside the Department of Interior. We also urge you to prohibit this practice or to open it up to full public transparency.
5. **Pipeline Environmental Impact Statement:** The BLM is developing the EIS to assess environmental impacts of the SNWA pipeline project. But SNWA is paying for the EIS. SNWA is supplying the data for the EIS. SNWA's consultant is providing the hydrological model which is needed to assess impacts. Scoping was completed for this EIS years ago, but the draft EIS has not yet been released. Thousands of comments on the scope of the EIS, many alternatives, and assessment of direct, indirect and cumulative impacts were submitted during the EIS scoping process, but we are unsure that they are being considered and that they will direct the actual draft EIS rather than SNWA's "needs." We urge you to investigate whether the pipeline EIS process is being conducted in compliance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, and other federal laws and regulations.

Thank you for considering our recommendations to the Interior Department transition team. For more information on the Nevada water grab, go to our website at: <http://greatbasinwaternetwork.org>.

Sincerely,

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Great Basin Water Network

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